

## Constructivism—Is the United States Making China an Enemy?

by

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# USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

## **CONSTRUCTIVISM – IS THE UNITED STATES MAKING CHINA AN ENEMY?**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This paper uses the theory of Constructivism in the context of international relations to determine if the United States is turning China into a future and formal enemy. Constructivism is explained using basic principles of Alexander Wendt's and Nicholas Onuf's view of constructivist theory. Principles of their theory are combined with historical examples, current United States policy, and United States decision maker comments and speeches to show how China is framed as an enemy, and the United States is helping to construct its own hostile national security environment.





## CONSTRUCTIVISM – IS THE UNITED STATES MAKING CHINA AN ENEMY?

Since the end of the Cold War the international order has been disrupted. No longer are there two opposing super powers managing the world in a tightly-framed construct of Communism versus Democracy. Rather, today's international order is more complex, characterized by emerging powers, the rebalancing of power, emerging economic powerhouses, non-state actors and transnational phenomena. Since 11 September 2001, the enemy of the United States has been difficult to identify and categorize, and hard to predict; it does not call forward a regular order of battle. In its "War on Terror" the United States has faced an amorphous enemy. As the War on Terror winds down after the death of Osama Bin Ladin, the nation seems to be seeking the clarity of a more traditional enemy – one that fits the paradigm of a "stable" bipolar order.<sup>1</sup> That enemy appears to be China. It is difficult to pick up a foreign relations journal, military journal, a newspaper or an economic journal without reading about China as a potential threat to the United States. As a large state with a rapidly growing economy, China is a natural rival. But must China necessarily be an enemy of the United States? Are we helping to turn China into our next nemesis? A study in international relations theory sheds light on this issue.

In the realm of international theory, "realists" focus mainly on national power, relying on the military to protect and preserve national interests. Simultaneously, neo-liberals focus on constitutional behavior – and the ability of international institutions to mediate international disputes and maintain international order. By contrast, a constructivist perspective says that we construct the environment that we live in. "We make the world what it is by interacting with each other and saying what we say to each

other.”<sup>2</sup> In constructivist theory this is applied not only at the individual level but at the state level as well. Applying the constructivist perspective to international relations theory can clearly show us how the United States is “constructing” a future world in which China is our primary enemy. Before exploring this further one must understand constructivism as it is applied in international relations theory.

### Definition of Constructivism

When considering constructivism as an international relations theory it should be understood that constructivism describes international politics as “socially constructed” phenomena.<sup>3</sup> It draws its roots from numerous social theories to include critical theory, postmodernism, feminist theory, historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, symbolic interactionism and structuration theory.<sup>4</sup> One of the fathers of constructivist theory is Alexander Wendt. Wendt posits that there are two basic tenants of constructivism: “1) that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces; and 2) that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature.”<sup>5</sup>

Given that shared ideas are the impetus behind Wendt’s notion of constructivism, one can see that ideas form those very interests that states compete for in the world. Wendt says that “ideas constitute power and interest in the first place.”<sup>6</sup> The critical tie here is that ideas are shared and interpreted by numerous actors. Each state or actor interprets ideas differently. Therefore, one idea considered by a state as a threat or interest to itself may not be seen as a threat or interest to another. Keeping this in mind, we must realize that repeated articulations of the idea that China is an enemy will create that situation in the minds of Americans. On the other hand, China may interpret this idea in a different way. But, if the articulation of the idea is consistent over time, it is

likely that China too will come to see itself as an enemy of the United States. Supporting this is the notion from another Constructivism theorist, Nicholas Onuf, who states that “We make the world what it is by interacting with each other and saying what we say to each other; saying is doing; talking is undoubtedly the most important way that we make the world what it is.”<sup>7</sup> This is true because “Constructivism holds that individuals and societies make, construct or constitute each other.”<sup>8</sup>

Onuf also believes that in a constructivist society “rules, social and legal, link society and people.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, “people are ‘agents’ and groups of people such as a government are a social construction and rules give governments a choice.”<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Onuf states that “a pattern of rules and related practices equals an institution.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, “the rule indicates whether those who perform these actions are warranted in doing so.”<sup>12</sup> When we exist in a world that has stable rules and institutions then we live in a world with structure. This means then that “rules make agents and institutions what they are in relation to each other.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to rules, another pertinent and important concept projected by Onuf is that of ‘speech acts’. Speech acts are “the act of speaking in a form that gets someone else to act.”<sup>14</sup> “Whether a speech act accomplishes anything depends on if the recipient responds to what they hear.”<sup>15</sup> Even more importantly, “the repetitiveness of the speech act makes everyone else think that this repetition is significant.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, if the United States continues to say that China is a competitor or enemy, then it will eventually construct this very situation through speech acts. Onuf further explains that the same old repetitive speech acts become “convention”.<sup>17</sup> If actors start to behave and act on this convention then they indeed become “rules”. Onuf explains in detail that there are

three types of rules: “instruction, directive, and commitment rules.”<sup>18</sup> Essentially, rules, also known as “norms”, are so important that they regulate the conduct of agents, in this case state or non-state actors. The more frequently a state or non-state actor follows a rule, the stronger this rule becomes. Rules applied in the international society are those very ideas that form a society’s behavior as they exercise the concepts of “balance of power, sovereignty, spheres of influence, and treaties.”<sup>19</sup> We can see then that states can decide to follow rules or not, and that they generally do so to gain an advantage in support of pursuing their national interests. If a state follows rules and communicates rules repeatedly, then they may ultimately influence other states to accept their ideas, good or bad, depending on interpretation. Behavior in this form is considered by Onuf to be “hegemony.”<sup>20</sup>

Ideas further identify speech acts and, subsequently, rules. Our international order in the global environment is based on ideas, norms and rules. Our speech acts regarding ideas, norms and rules combine with our actions to construct the world that we live in. Ultimately the execution of rules and norms become deeds. “Deeds are responses to and constituents of the circumstances in which people find themselves.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, the more China-as-enemy speech acts the United States makes, the more it constructs a world where this idea comes to fruition.

### Applying History

To further exemplify constructivist theory it is important to provide some historical examples of how states have constructed the world that they live in. One example is the idea of “Pax Americana” that evolved after World War II.<sup>22</sup> Essentially, the United States determined that it would intervene internationally wherever and whenever it chose in the name of freedom and prosperity.<sup>23</sup> This is a condition where the United States made a

proclamation and acted on a principle; a principle in this case being a norm or rule. This is a simple example of how the United States constructed its own environment and how it would act in such an environment.

An example of constructivism similar to Pax Americana is the “Domino Theory”. This theory was promulgated by the United States during the Cold War as a rationale for the use of force to protect its interests. It postulated that if a country were to fall under Communist control then the surrounding countries would ultimately face the same demise, thus create “a domino effect”. This had a profound influence on the United States entry into the Vietnam War. During a 1954 news conference President Eisenhower explained the theory: “Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the falling domino principle. You have a row of dominos set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of disintegration that would have the most profound influences.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, United States policy for war was built on the idea of a game of dominos. By insistence on this metaphor, and by repeating it often, the Americans constructed their own reality – a reality that helped to make warfare a necessity.

Another example was the 1956 Suez Crisis. In this situation, Egypt’s president Gamal Abdel Nassar decided to nationalize the Suez Canal on the brink of British Colonial force withdrawal. The timing of this action and Britain’s attempt at regional security with the Baghdad Pact and “Operation Alpha” (an attempt with the United States to resolve Arab-Israeli relations)<sup>25</sup> created a situation that allowed Britain’s Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, to construct his country’s views and actions towards Egypt.<sup>26</sup>

Prior to these events Eden had no fixed attitude toward Nassar. As the events unfolded, Eden's actions and attitude changed. After Israeli commandos attacked an Egyptian military base in Gaza, Egypt sought an arms deal with the United States. The United States was slow to respond, forcing Nassar to seek support from Czechoslovakia, a Soviet state.<sup>27</sup> At this point, using speech acts, Eden began to identify Nassar as a communist, in part because Nassar turned to Soviet assistance for building the Aswan High Dam after the British and United States failed to resource the project.<sup>28</sup> Lastly, General John Bagot Glubb was removed from his post commanding the Arab Legion in Jordan.<sup>29</sup> Eden believed that Nassar influenced Glubb's removal from this position. From this point onward, Eden's language began to change toward Nassar. He claimed that "he is our enemy and shall be treated as such."<sup>30</sup> Using speech acts, Eden created an image of Nassar as untrustworthy, and beholden to communist ideology. He even compared Nassar to Hitler and Mussolini. In this case "Britain's middle east policy became a self-fulfilling prophecy."<sup>31</sup> The more Eden vilified Nassar using speech acts, the more the situation eroded, resulting in the discontinuation of Operation Alpha, no further financing of the Aswan High Dam and the ultimate nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. His speech acts predicted and created the situation.<sup>32</sup>

#### Making China into an Enemy: Special Documents

Using constructivism we can see clear evidence today that we are in a game of brinksmanship as we in the United States address China. Multiple sources including policy documents, television programs, journals, and newspapers all provide rich examples of how we are helping to transform China into a future enemy. We might turn first to policy documents.

The United States *National Security Strategy* of May 2010 identifies our security concerns and our ends and ways to address those concerns.<sup>33</sup> To identify and characterize a country in our *National Security Strategy* is a speech act that surely could put another state on edge depending on how that state interprets the reference. Being identified as a possible security threat to the United States can be intimidating and can cause negative interpretations or consequences of that speech act. China is mentioned ten times and inferred numerous times in the 2010 *National Security Strategy*. Our *National Security Strategy* says that “power in an interconnected world is no longer a zero sum game.”<sup>34</sup> Our *National Security Strategy* also enforces the constructivist concept of rules, stating that “rules of the road must be followed, and there must be consequences for those nations that break the rules – whether they are non-proliferation obligations, trade agreements, or human rights conditions.”<sup>35</sup> This statement makes an implicit reference to China since it has long been considered by the United States as a violator of human rights. China’s interpretation of this speech act regarding rules could be a negative one, ultimately increasing tension in future interactions.

Additionally, the *National Security Strategy* states that “we will not seek to impose our values through force. Instead, we are working to strengthen international norms on behalf of human rights, while welcoming all peaceful democratic movements.”<sup>36</sup> Again, China as a Communist state, could interpret this message as a threat to its national interest. The *National Security Strategy* addresses cyberspace, saying that “the threats we face range from individual criminal hackers to organic criminal groups, from terrorist networks to advanced nation states.”<sup>37</sup> In this case, while

China is not identified directly, it could infer that “advanced nation states” is directed toward them as the United States has identified them as a major cyber threat in the last decade.

One of the growing topics of concern mentioned in numerous sources today is the build-up of China’s military capacity. This concern is also addressed in the *National Security Strategy*: “we will strengthen our regional deterrence postures in order to make certain that regional adversaries gain no advantages from their acquisition of new, offensive military capabilities.”<sup>38</sup> An even a stronger statement follows: “we will monitor China’s military modernization program and prepare accordingly to ensure that United States interests and allies, regionally and globally, are not negatively affected.”<sup>39</sup> Even as the United States may strive to assure its allies, it further alarms China. The *National Security Strategy* could be interpreted by China as implying that they have made poor choices in the past. The document states “we will encourage China to make choices that contribute to peace, security, and prosperity as its influence rises.”<sup>40</sup> And the *National Security Strategy* discusses how “we must encourage continued reduction in tension between the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan,”<sup>41</sup> yet another sensitive subject that could spark negative power talk and speech acts that further alienate China from the United States.

While the *National Security Strategy* addresses a broad scheme of threats and security issues, it focuses on international norms, rules, values and national interest. Perceptions and interpretation of these rules, norms, values and national interest can, by their very nature, raise tension. Thus, when identifying China directly in this policy document, we heighten tensions between ourselves and China, positioning one another



as future enemies. Other policy documents do the same, including the United States *National Military Strategy*, of February, 2011.

Our *National Military Strategy* lays out what the United States security threats are, and how the military instrument of power will address those threats. It, like the *National Security Strategy*, makes some indirect and direct references to China. For example, the *National Military Strategy* says that “some states are conducting or condoning cyber intrusions that foreshadow growing threat in this globally connected domain.”<sup>42</sup> Again, while China was not directly mentioned here, one could infer that China is the culprit.

China is a suspected cyber threat to the United States and many analysts, pundits, and public intellectuals are concerned. James Lewis told NPR's Rachel Martin, "The Chinese have, since 1986, been plugging steadily along at building up their technological capacities, and that includes cyber-espionage."<sup>43</sup> Lewis also says “The technology and defense industries are the most vulnerable. Those industries are areas China has identified that the nation needs to grow, but Chinese hackers have even broken into and stolen plans from American furniture manufacturers.”<sup>44</sup>

The United States Government’s fear of cyber intrusion is so great that “upon assuming office in 2009, President Barack Obama declared cyberspace a strategic national asset and requested a complete Cyberspace Policy Review. In May 2011, the White House also released its International Strategy for Cyberspace in an attempt to signal to both allies and adversaries what the United States expects and what its plans are in this emerging medium.”<sup>45</sup> One example in recent history of a cyber intrusion was in April 2009, when computer hackers gained access to the \$300 billion Joint Strike

Fighter project which is one of the Defense Department's costliest weapons programs in history. "In milliseconds, bandits were able to make off with several terabytes of data related to the aircraft's design and electronics system. Once again, officials said the attacks appeared to originate from China, but attribution challenges make verifying this claim extremely difficult."<sup>46</sup>

As the United States seeks stability in certain regions of the world, various countries interpret this behavior as U.S. hegemony, or an attempt by the U.S. to enforce its will and preserve its own interests. The *National Military Strategy* states, "as our presence and alliance commitments remain the key to preserving stability in Northeast Asia, we will look for security opportunities to support our nation's increased emphasis on its relationship with ASEAN and other multinational forums."<sup>47</sup> China's interpretation of this speech act could lead it to believe that its sovereignty is challenged as we encourage a circle of influence around them in the region.

Speech acts combined with rhetorical encirclement of China ultimately could pit the United States and China against one another as formal enemies in the future. We reinforce this possible interpretation of encirclement by stating in our *National Military Strategy* that "we will expand our military security cooperation, exchanges, and exercises with the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Singapore, and other states in Oceania – working with them to address domestic and common foreign threats to their nation's integrity and security."<sup>48</sup> How China interprets this particular speech act is important. Clearly China might interpret this as an effort by the United States to encircle and contain it, particularly since most of these countries

border China or share international waters that habitually have been contested in ways that bear upon China's sovereignty and Exclusive Economic Zone considerations.

More importantly, and very meaningful, is our message to China in our *National Military Strategy* indicating that we are monitoring their actions. The following statement from the *National Military Strategy* can clearly help to structure "an us versus them" situation:

We will continue to monitor fully China's military developments and the implications those developments have on the military balance in the Taiwan Strait. We remain concerned about the extent and strategic intent of China's military modernization, and its assertiveness in space, cyberspace, in the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea. To safeguard U.S. and partner nation interest, we will be prepared to demonstrate the will and commit the resources needed to oppose any nation's actions that jeopardize access and use of the global commons and cyberspace, or that threaten the security of our allies.<sup>49</sup>

Again, while this may reassure our allies, it may in fact undermine our relationship with China. Naturally, China feels that it has certain rights as a state, such as growing its military or controlling its own Exclusive Economic Zone. Words that are aimed at clarifying a national position, or deterring another state, do not always have the intended effect. Instead, they can make the target state hostile, defensive, and aggressive. Thus, China's interpretation of this speech act could very easily be negative and make them feel as an automatic enemy of the United States.

The United States *National Defense Strategy*, written in 2008, points to China as a very clear competitor. To the Chinese, it further reinforces their conception of how the United States sees them. The *National Defense Strategy* states that

China is one ascendant state with the potential for competing with the United States. For the foreseeable future, we will need to hedge against China's growing military modernization and the impact of its strategic choices upon international security. It is likely that China will continue to expand its conventional military capabilities, emphasizing anti-access and

area denial assets including developing a full range of long-strike, space and information warfare capabilities.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, the *National Defense Strategy* states “we will continue to improve and refine our capabilities to respond to China if necessary.”<sup>51</sup> These two speech acts, by the very fact of their being included in this very important defense policy document, underscore the fact that China is considered an enemy by the United States. This makes the United States position on China clear to all potential readers.

The *National Defense Strategy* goes on to indicate that “we will continue to press China to increase transparency in its defense budget expenditures, strategies, plans and intentions.”<sup>52</sup> Again, depending on how China interprets this, there seems to be an indication that if China does not comply, the United States will act. This kind of language eliminates incentives for - and space for - compromise and negotiation.

The *National Defense Strategy* says further, “China is developing technologies to disrupt our traditional advantages. Examples include development of anti-satellite capabilities and cyber warfare.”<sup>53</sup> While China’s interpretation of this statement is one issue, our own military’s and government agencies’ interpretation is equally important. A military leader reading this is bound to see China as an enemy. Our continuous words and deeds indicating that China is a threat have potential to construct the very situation we are trying to avoid. The Chinese – United States competition becomes what we make it – or what we “construct” it into being.

Another prominent policy document is the *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, the most recent version of which was published in February 2010. It too identifies China as a rising power. It also names China as a possible enemy by stating:

China is developing and fielding large numbers of advanced medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles, new attack submarines equipped with

advanced weapons, increasingly capable long-range air defense systems, electronic warfare and computer network attack capabilities, advanced fighter aircraft, and counter-space systems. China has shared limited information about the pace, scope, and ultimate aims of its military modernization programs, raising a number of legitimate questions regarding its long-term intentions.<sup>54</sup>

While this statement of fact is meant to inform domestic and allied audiences, it nonetheless helps “create” a situation of wariness and strain. China might also read this language as dismissive, disrespectful, or simply insulting. One *Quadrennial Defense Review* passage reads: “lack of transparency and the nature of China’s military development and decision making processes raise legitimate questions about its future conduct and intentions within Asia and beyond.”<sup>55</sup> As United States Department of Defense personnel, government leaders, supporters and the domestic population hear repeated renditions of these statements, they can hardly fail to perceive China as an enemy of the United States.

In January 2012, a new strategic policy document entered the arena when President Obama and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta issued “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense”. This document mirrored the QDR, NDS, and NMS in stating that we will shift our focus of global presence “emphasizing the Asia-Pacific.”<sup>56</sup> It states that China has “the potential to affect the U.S. economy and our security in a variety of ways” and that “the growth of China’s military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region.”<sup>57</sup> On page four, it also says that “China will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter our power projection capabilities.”<sup>58</sup> This final notion is supported by the fact that Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, recently released a new Joint Operational Access Concept that names no

adversary but “focuses on “anti-access” and “area-denial” threats – terms that the Department of Defense associates closely with China.”<sup>59</sup> Again, what may seem like a simple statement of fact has the potential to raise the temperature of United States-Chinese relations.

### Making China into an Enemy: Speeches

While it is certainly easy to dissect military-related policy documents for evidence of how the United States is posturing China as its next enemy, it remains clear that U.S. national security organizations are not the only contributors to the construction of China as a US enemy. US leaders, current and potential, contribute to this effort in their words and deeds quite often. Sometimes the point of tension has nothing to do with military power. For example, after a speech by Vice President Joe Biden to students at Sichuan University in Chengdu, China, where he poorly communicated the United States view on the Chinese one-child per family policy, the State Department highlighted yet another tension between the United States and China when it stated “that the U.S. found the Chinese on-child-per-couple policy repugnant and that the Obama Administration strongly opposes all aspects of China’s coercive birth-limitation policies, including forced abortion and sterilization.”<sup>60</sup> This kind of statement is surely interpreted by China as unwelcome interference in its domestic affairs.

In contrast to Biden, the President is more careful in his speech. While he tends to communicate certain warnings to China, he usually balances these with positive remarks. But, while this balancing act may keep the peace, short term, it also leads to incoherent or conflicting speech acts. Recently, during a trip in November 2011 to the Pacific region, the President stated, “as we plan and budget for the future, we will allocate the resources necessary to maintain our strong military presence in this region.

We will preserve our unique ability to project power and deter threats to peace.....The United States is a Pacific Power, and we are here to stay.”<sup>61</sup> The President continued to push tensions by expounding on what constructivist theorists call rules and norms. According to author George Condon, “his main message to China is that they need to start playing by the rules in their dealings with other countries, whether in the South China Sea or in the valuation of China’s currency.”<sup>62</sup> China could read this as hegemonic behavior by the United States.

During the same time frame another key figure, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, made similar speech acts. These were equally strong in tone. Speaking indirectly to but clearly about China, she stated that “those with a claim on the South China Sea do not have a right to pursue it through intimidation or coercion.”<sup>63</sup> The South China Sea, along with the Yellow Sea and the Strait of Taiwan, have been hot spots for contention as China seeks to claim rights over its Exclusive Economic Zone which overlaps with other sovereign nations’ territorial waters. Tension has lead to direct military conflict between the United States and China. In 2001 and 2009, China’s attempts to enforce its interpretation of UNCLOS resulted in several dangerous encounters between U.S. ships and aircraft and Chinese ships and aircraft.”<sup>64</sup> Incidents included the April 1, 2001 collision between a Chinese F-3 fighter and a U.S. Navy IT-3E “Aries” surveillance plane<sup>65</sup> and the March, 2009 Chinese intercept of the USNS Impeccable<sup>66</sup> where “the U.S. claimed right of “innocent passage”; the Chinese alleged that the vessel was interfering with economic rights.”<sup>67</sup>

China’s response to the President’s and Secretary Clinton’s messages was less than positive; the Chinese indicated that “they would only affect the atmosphere of

cooperation and mutual trust, damaging a hard-won setting of healthy development in the region and that China was merely a scapegoat for U.S. financial problems.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, it is clear that while we may try to reinforce positive behavior and international norms, our speech acts can have a negative influence that further exacerbate tension that could erupt in the future.

Other influential leaders also have key roles in constructing China as an enemy. For example, some GOP presidential candidates hold very strong feelings about China – views which they have communicated during Presidential candidate debates. In debates held in November of 2011, China was mentioned as a competitor, and a threat. What these candidates say is telling and has potential to create further friction. For example, candidate Mitt Romney promised that “if elected president”, he would “issue an executive order to sanction China for unfair trade practices.”<sup>69</sup> Romney unavoidably escalated tension as he claimed that “his policy toward China would include arming Taiwan to the hilt.”<sup>70</sup> As he panders to an extremely conservative element of the Republican party, he helps unsettle United States – China relations.

Other candidates have jumped on the “get tough with China” bandwagon, including former Senator Rick Santorum, who said “I want to go to war with China.”<sup>71</sup> Candidate Rick Perry, during the 2011 debate in South Carolina on foreign policy stated “I happen to think that the Communist Chinese government will end up on the ash heap of history if they do not change their virtues.”<sup>72</sup> Former candidate Michelle Bachman during the 2011 CNBC GOP Primary Debate in Rochester, Michigan said the Chinese “have been bad actors.” Continuing on, she made accusations about China dumping



counterfeit computer chips in the United States, asserting that by paying back money we owe to China we help to build China's military.<sup>73</sup>

Presidents, Vice Presidents, Secretaries of State, and Presidential candidates are perceived as leaders in this nation. The speech acts they commit have influence on the American people and their views of the world. When they articulate strong views, the American people tend to quickly adopt those views. The repetitiveness of the speech acts facilitates a norm or convention, and furthers the likelihood that we construct an environment where China is our formal enemy. Constructivist theory reminds us that it is not only what we say, but also how China interprets what we say, that is important.

Our nation's leaders' concern about China is very strong, so strong in fact that there is a 2011 Report to Congress by the U.S-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Congress created The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission in October 2000. Congress provided the Commission with the "legislative mandate to monitor, investigate, and submit to Congress an annual report on the national security implications of the bilateral trade and economic relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China."<sup>74</sup> Based on the Commission's findings, and where appropriate the Commission provides recommendations to Congress for "legislative and administrative action."<sup>75</sup> This 440-plus page document, printed in November 2011, lays out very clear recommendations on how the United States should proceed with Chinese relations. The fact that this report was written may be no surprise but what is a surprise is that the document lies as an open source on the internet, as a potential source of direct offense to China. How could China not feel that

they are an enemy to the United States after reading a document that states, for instance “Congress direct that the Government Accountability Office evaluate the DoD’s early warning systems to ensure that the department will have sufficient warning if the PLA attack in the event of conflict.”<sup>76</sup> Or, “Congress [will] assess the adequacy of funding for DoD programs that ensue the military’s capability to operate effectively against China’s Area Control Strategy measures.”<sup>77</sup> Even additional views added to the report, not listed as formal recommendations, could create tension: “In the South China Sea, China’s vigorous assertion of its exaggerated claims has been a destabilizing force in the region that threatens to grow worse.”<sup>78</sup>

This is a report to Congress. Members of Congress represent the people in this country. In doing so, he or she reflects constituents’ views and opinions. The perception of a Chinese threat to the United States is spreading, and it is spreading quickly as senior leaders and Congress continue to highlight the issue in a negative tone.

The people of the United States and the rest of the world are beginning to focus extensively on U.S.- China relations. For example, according to the U.S.- based “Global Language Monitor”, which tracks the top 50,000 print and electronic media sites throughout the world, the “rise of China” was the most “read-about” media theme of the past decade, surpassing even the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the Iraq War.<sup>79</sup> As of 26 December 2011, the trend for 2012 is that “China” will be one of the top words in the annual global survey of the English language.<sup>80</sup> A search engine at the United States Army War College Library which searches newspaper articles, journals, dissertations, trade publication articles, book reviews, books and ebooks, offered interesting insights into this phenomenon. Using the search note of “U.S.+ China

relations” there were 192,532 references. Using “U.S. and China competition” as the search note, there were 118,926 total hits. Further narrowing the search note to “China as an enemy to the U.S.” brought 69,141 total hits and 3,201 for 2011 alone; 13 of those were books, and over 1300 were newspaper articles.

Information about the United States-Chinese relationship is flooding the public domain. As this happens it is conceivable that “China is being demonized, and that there could be an anti-Chinese nationalist backlash against everything from the country’s growing wealth to its expanding military prowess to its population’s new taste for luxury goods.”<sup>81</sup> Remembering that we must observe how China interprets our speech acts, it is important to note that some of their mainstream media inflames the tension as well. This can certainly be a two-way street. For example, a Chinese daily newspaper, a nationalistic tabloid, stated that President Obama’s “strategy intensifies and exploits public fear of the unknown” and that “many dogged U.S. media outlets are devoted to disseminating China-phobic fears.”<sup>82</sup>

Many Americans are nervous about looming future competition with China. One business man returning from a visit to China “came away acutely perceptive and fearful of whether America is willing and able to compete with a nation so focused, so energetic, so willing to do what it takes to prosper in this new century.”<sup>83</sup> Senior Fellow, Jonathan D. Pollack, of the John L. Thornton China Center at the Brookings Institution, says that “China looms large in the American consciousness.”<sup>84</sup> Adding to the nervousness are several books indicating tension in US-Chinese relations. For example, Aaron Friedberg recently wrote *China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*. Other titles include *Living with the Dragon: How the American Public Views the*

*Rise of China* by Benjamin Page and Tao Xie and *Superpower Struggles: Mighty America, Faltering Europe, Rising China* by John Redwood. Several recent journal articles speak to the same subject. For instance, the National Defense University publication, *Joint Force Quarterly*, published five articles specifically addressing US-Chinese relations between the 4th Quarter 2011 and 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2012 issues. Military leaders also feed public concerns, last fall, Admiral Robert Willard, the new head of United States Pacific Command, noted that “in the past decade or so, China has executed most of our intelligence estimates of their military capability implying that maybe the alarmists are on to something.”<sup>85</sup> It is apparent that “there is deep strategic mistrust between the two countries. China’s rapid economic growth, steady military modernization, and relentless nationalistic propaganda at home are shaping Chinese public expectations and limiting possibilities for compromise with other powers.”<sup>86</sup> Many Americans simply are not comfortable with a growing and influential Communist China. In July 2011 “John Birch Society members passed out literature and held up signs on the sidewalk in front of the National Governors Association Conference opposing new coziness with Communist China.”<sup>87</sup>

As we decipher whether the United States is helping to construct a future environment of high tension with China, we must remember that our speech acts highlighting Chinese “violation” of norms, as we interpret them, might only exacerbate the problem and alienate China further. According to TIME Magazine’s Michael Schuman, “Simplistic sloganeering that goes on in the United States about China only intensifies those problems and makes them harder to resolve.”<sup>88</sup>

Understanding constructivism in an international theory context, and understanding that speech acts create rules and norms about how actors view issues, sets the foundation for understanding that the United States is helping to make an enemy out of China. Our numerous defense policy documents, combined with speech acts generated by our nation's senior leaders, only fuel the negative image of China among the American people. This process becomes self-feeding and self-perpetuating. Interpretation of these speech acts and ideas is not a one sided event. While the United States domestic population interprets ideas about China, Chinese leadership and the Chinese people are doing the same. Constructivist theory predicts that when two sides continuously refer to one another in hostile and wary terms, they will "construct" a scenario in which they become enemies. The United States arguably has painted China as an enemy and security threat while at the same time identifying it as an economic competitor on the world stage. Actions by the United States decision-makers, and speech acts by United States leaders, are creating an environment of increasing hostility and mistrust. As we survey documents, speeches, and media, we can see that the constructivists may well be right. We may be "constructing" our enemy of the future.

### The Future

As we move into the future, and as we try to reassure our allies about China, we may end up making China feel paranoid and encircled. If we acknowledge this situation now, then we can take necessary steps to prevent further tension. One way to accomplish this is to tone this down the administration's rhetoric toward China. President Obama seems to be attempting to implement this strategy, much to the distaste of many political, community and business leaders. While tempered rhetoric is only a partial solution, it is better than ignoring the problem altogether. I believe that we

ought to continually and explicitly acknowledge this dilemma – making clear to the Chinese that reassurance of allies ought not to translate directly (in their minds) into aggressive rhetoric. In order to tone down the rhetoric we must be cognizant of what we say, and realize that even as we speak to our domestic population and our allies, we build tension with the Chinese. It is very hard to control the public press and public leaders; all one can do is to have public officials set the appropriate tone, and thus try to set an example for others to follow. After all, official voices are the most important ones when communicating strategic issues.

The fact that we are self-focused intensifies the problem. In today's globalized world, we as a nation must work harder to see and hear the world through the eyes and ears of others. It is imperative that we understand and are aware of Chinese culture and history. Chinese culture and history feeds its grand strategy of “strategic defense utilizing conventional and unconventional diplomatic and military means in a geographic orientation and protracted manner.”<sup>89</sup> It is possible to work compatibly with this strategy using Secretary of State Clinton's concept of “Smart Power”, which uses “new tools and techniques available for diplomacy and development to build more-durable coalitions and networks.”<sup>90</sup> Part of the “Smart Power” approach should include United States policy makers' understanding of “the war of resistance strategy, and be able to develop their own unified strategy, one that encourages China to benefit from a stable world order and encourages it to play a constructive role.”<sup>91</sup> The time has passed when brow-beating China with our demands is likely to yield successful results. Indeed, now that China is a global power in its own right, this approach may do more harm than good in the long run. China is still sensitive to its past – a legacy of Western intrusion and

colonialism inside their borders. It is imperative that we use a balanced diplomatic, informational and economic approach before we construct a world where the only remaining alternative is military conflict between the United States and China.

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